

and Caribbean historical events, actions by Cuban, regional, and imperialist governments, as well as flows of working people and communications to and from Cuba. Finally, Caribbean historians interested in linkages and transnational regional developments in the first half of the twentieth century have a useful framework in which to re-imagine the human movements of working people across the Caribbean. Cuba was definitely a main site of regional economic development and thus the central pole attracting migrant labor, but this book insists – and insists successfully – that Cuba cannot be studied in isolation and must be understood within a regional Caribbean context in which migrant workers found employment on the island and in which the same working people from various islands helped to shape Cuba’s diaspora identity.

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WEISS, HOLGER. *Framing a Radical African Atlantic. African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers.* [Studies in Global Social History, Vol. 14.] Brill, Leiden [etc.] 2014. xvi, 752 pp. € 199.00; \$258.00. doi:10.1017/S002085901400025X

The relationship between “class” and “race” in the 1920s and 1930s, captured in the term “the Negro Question”, has always been an “uneasy marriage”. Through the agency of African-American, African-Caribbean, and African intellectuals it was placed on the political agenda of several national and international organizations and movements, notably the global communist networks and, at the other end of the spectrum, Marcus Garvey’s UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association). Whereas Garvey put race before class and advocated a Pan-African policy, communists from an African background contributed to and followed, sometimes reluctantly, Comintern policies.

In *Framing a Radical African Atlantic* Holger Weiss follows black participants in the communist networks in great detail, focusing on the ITUC-NW (International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers) and on its most important members and leaders: (Kweku) Bankole Awoonor Renner (Ghana, 1898–1970), James W. Ford (Alabama, USA, 1893–1957), George Padmore (Trinidad, 1902–1959;<sup>1</sup> his real name was Malcolm Nurse), and Otto Huiswoud (Suriname, 1893–1961). The ITUC-NW, founded in 1928, was the “Comintern’s answer to the ‘Negro Question’”, a question, as Weiss stresses, which had become a transnational one at the beginning of the twentieth century (p. 7). It formed on the one hand part of the Comintern and RILU (Red International of Labour Unions) networks and on the other part of the networks of people of African descent who, bound by “black solidarity”, engaged in finding solutions for the racial inequalities worldwide, starting in the USA, as well as advocating an anti-colonial and anti-imperialistic struggle. One of the proposed solutions has become known as the “Black Belt thesis”, referring to

1. There is confusion about his year of birth; some scholars say 1903, Weiss claims it was 1900 (p. 38). It seems almost certain that he was born on 28 July 1902.

the southern states in the USA as an entity (or, some would say, nation) in itself and its right of self-determination.

The ITUC-NW thrived for only five years: 1928–1933. After the raid on the Hamburg secretariat in 1933 the organization lost its momentum and much of its fervour and in 1937–1938 the ITUC-NW was silently dissolved. However, in those first five years it worked hard to establish an African-Atlantic if not global network of “Negro toilers”, and in 1931 *The Negro Worker* was relaunched (after a short-lived start in 1928). James W. Ford and journalist George Padmore were its most influential editors and authors. Their aims were to make *The Negro Worker* the “leading radical political” black journal, with a broad reach throughout the African Atlantic, and to offer space for the “points of view” and “daily life” of those labourers. At the same time, Moscow pulled the strings where the direction of *The Negro Worker* was concerned (pp. 551–570).

The First International Conference of Negro Workers, held in Hamburg in July 1930, chaired by James W. Ford, was an important step towards setting the “African agenda”. Besides being attended by several African-American representatives, the conference attracted delegates from the Caribbean and, more importantly, several African (colonized) countries, such as Sierra Leone, Gold Coast (Ghana), Gambia, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa. Not surprisingly, the independence of *all* colonies was called for (“Down with Imperialism!”, as Ford put it).<sup>2</sup> As was the case with the ITUC-NW itself and *The Negro Worker*, the conference was closely monitored by the Comintern. As Weiss rightly points out, it has since become a mere footnote in the history of communism and the Comintern. But for the delegates, the conference provided an important platform for their specific colonial and racial problems. In the opinion of its organizers and participants it marked the beginning of a new era (pp. 252–253).

It was an often-wobbly path to reach out to the entire African-Atlantic world and mobilize communists or would-be communists for the just cause; the – colonized – African continent especially proved to be a difficult case. The ITUC-NW was not the only body to develop policies towards Africa and the African Atlantic; other organizations, such as the Internationale Rote Hilfe (IRH, International Red Aid), too, tried to strengthen their activities among the Negro toilers. And they supported one another under the banner of international solidarity, anti-colonialism, and anti-imperialism (p. 388), though with limited success.

What was needed, to put it awkwardly, were compelling cases that would fill people with indignation. The Scottsboro case was just such an opportunity. In 1931 nine African American teenage boys were accused of raping two white girls in Scottsboro, Alabama. What followed was an unfair trial with tampered evidence and an all-white jury. On top of that a mob tried to lynch the boys. The case became known worldwide. The ITUC-NW and the IRH, but also the LAI (League against Imperialism and for Colonial Independence) and many non-communist organizations and the press, took it up and mobilized and channelled the discontent and outrage. Needless to say, “race” was at the heart of this case, which became much more than just nine boys convicted wrongfully.

Despite such – short-lived – successes, the ITUC-NW faced many hardships in trying to establish a truly global radical black network. One reason was that most of the leading men and women were Anglo-Saxon African Americans, who considered themselves black avant-gardists in the worldwide revolution. Establishing lasting contacts with Africans in Africa remained one of the organization’s main weaknesses; since there existed no party structures in these areas (except in South Africa), they had to rely on union structures or “radical” individuals. It seemed hard, if not impossible, to also include French- and

2. *A Report of Proceedings and Decisions of the First International Conference of Negro Workers, at Hamburg, Germany, July 1930* (Hamburg, 1930), p. 13.

Portuguese-speaking Africans in the network. Secondly, Comintern policies, as well as the practices of national communist parties, were often not in favour of ITUC-NW policies. This was, in essence, rooted in the ongoing frictions between “class before race” and “race before class” which, in the eyes of both the increasingly Stalinist-dominated Comintern and the African “radicals”, were almost impossible to resolve. Thirdly, the ITUC-NW was in constant need of funds to run the bureau and to issue *The Negro Worker*.

George Padmore was expelled from the Communist Party in February 1934. Weiss shows that from Moscow’s viewpoint this was due to his alleged failure in leading the Hamburg secretariat of the ITUC-NW and to the fact that African students he had been sending to Moscow lacked the necessary screening. Padmore engaged more and more in Pan-African policies, as did many other black activists, disillusioned by the directives from Moscow and the practices of metropolitan communist parties. As Weiss puts it: “he [Padmore] would have to choose sides – race or class first?” (p. 608). I might add that a number of the black radicals under scrutiny here opted deliberately for the *international* approach of the Comintern since the national communist parties – of the USA, France, and the UK for instance – were considered white bulwarks, whereas the Comintern contained the promise of a struggle of “white and black together”. Disillusionment with this promise, too, prompted several of them to decide to leave the party and to engage in other political activities, such as Pan-Africanism or, later on, the Black Muslim movement.

Otto Huiswoud, a prominent member of the Communist Party USA, was one of the radicals who preferred the path of internationalism.<sup>3</sup> He succeeded Padmore as leader of the ITUC-NW and as chief editor of *The Negro Worker*. He advocated “class before race” (he opposed, for instance, the Black Belt thesis), but at the same time fervently attacked the virulent racism both inside and outside communist organizations. Initially successful, he came to face the same problems that beset Ford and Padmore: how to establish lasting contacts in Africa and the Caribbean and how to find the right, trustworthy candidates to train as agent provocateurs. Furthermore, communications with Moscow often failed, and the political situation in Europe in the mid-1930s forced the organization to go underground.

In 1935 the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern delivered the final blow to the RILU, and subsequently the ITUC-NW, by embracing the Popular Front doctrine. A few years later, *The Negro Worker*, together with the ITUC-NW, was erased from the scene. What remained were the several – mostly personal – networks in the African Atlantic, which after World War II would offer fertile ground for the political Pan-African movements and the struggle for independence in Africa and other colonized parts of the world. Weiss focuses on the interwar period, years in which many concepts relating to colonialism, racism, and future decolonization were laid out that would, one way or another, materialize in the years after World War II. In his “Postscript” (pp. 717–721) Weiss concludes that the ITUC-NW was just a small ripple in the Comintern sea, but it created the structure on which the old and new generation of black radicals would build their politics and activism in the postwar years. The influence of these networks and the role of leading black radicals, particularly in the postwar civil rights movement in the USA, have also been stressed by Joyce Moore Turner in her *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance*.<sup>4</sup>

Weiss has made extensive use of the Comintern’s archive in Moscow (RGASPI), as well as the archives of affiliated organizations, such as the League against Imperialism and for Colonial Independence (LAI), to reconstruct the history of the ITUC-NW, the Hamburg

3. Maria van Enckevort, “The Life and Work of Otto Huiswoud: Professional Revolutionary and Internationalist (1893–1961)” (Ph.D., University of the West Indies, Mona, 2000), p. 34.

4. Joyce Moore Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance* (Urbana, IL, 2005).

secretariat, and the whereabouts of its members and leaders. The outcome is a rather insightful book, which omits neither the major nor the minor details.

One thing that puzzles me is the titles of the four parts that comprise *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*. Weiss uses the first names of his four main characters: Bankole, James, George, and Otto. Why not Renner, Ford, Padmore, and Huiswoud? And why use these names at all, since the four parts only slightly coincide with these four key individuals?

Finally, a remark concerning the editing of the book. Regrettably, this volume contains many mistakes, mainly typographical errors, which could have been avoided. One would have expected more careful editing of such an expensive publication.

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ZACCARIA, MASSIMO. *Anch'io per la tua bandiera. Il V Battaglione Ascari in missione sul fronte libico (1912)*. Giorgio Pozza Editore, Ravenna. 2012. 263 pp. € 17.00. doi:10.1017/S0020859014000261

This volume traces the history of the first Eritrean battalion employed by the Italians in the war for the conquest of Libya during 1912. In his introduction, the author explains that his book is not intended to be a study in military history, but rather a “visual novel” (p. 9). More broadly, *Anch'io per la tua bandiera* contributes to the history of colonial and post-colonial imaginary, showing the entangled process started by the *ascari* (“soldiers”, in Arabic) and their “exhibition” in Italian and Eritrean societies. In particular, Zaccaria analyses the “celebration” of the *ascari* both in colonial areas and in Italy, and he explains how this celebration was related to a number of political goals. In Italy they were used to rally the population behind the colonial war, alleviating the trauma of the defeat at Adwa (inflicted by the Ethiopian Empire in 1896). In Libya the Italian government sought to undermine Libyan resistance using the *ascari* in their propaganda in religious terms: they were presented as specifically Muslim soldiers who were loyal to the Italians. Finally, the Eritrean battalion served as a symbol of an Italian “civilizing mission”, demonstrating Italy’s colonial achievements to the European colonial powers.

In relation to existing Italian literature on the colonial and post-colonial period, the book goes beyond the divide between, on the one side, the “classical” historiographical approach to colonial history, focused mainly on institutional and political issues, and cultural history on the other. With regard to the sources, the author combines institutional sources, such as government and military accounts, with visual sources, including post-cards and pictures. In doing so, he aims to integrate national and colonial history, showing the reciprocal correlation between the processes occurring in Italy and in the colonies. Following this double perspective, the book can be divided into two parts: Chapters 1 to 4 examine chronologically the path of the *ascari* from Eritrea, where they were recruited, to Libya, where they fought, to Italy, where they were sent to in order to be “celebrated”, up to their return to their homeland. Chapters 5 to 7 focus on the cultural aspects of the presence of the *ascari* in Italy, and in its two former colonies.

Beginning with the recruitment of the Fifth Battalion, Eritrea increasingly became the military reserve for the Libyan campaign. As the author underlines, the exploitation of human